



A Study on the English Translation of Names of Cultural Relics: A Case Study of Cultural Relics Excavated from the Liangzhu Site

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Abstract— *Cultural relics contain rich historical and cultural information, and their English translation is an important part of cross-cultural communication. There are numerous cultural relics in the Liangzhu site, which represent the late Neolithic culture. This article analyzes the translation methods based on the requirements of translation of the cultural relics. The author intends to adopt the literal translation, annotations, and free translations. Through translation the author hope that the target readers can better understand the Liangzhu cultural relics and promote the dissemination of Chinese culture and Liangzhu culture.*



Keywords— *Culture going global, English translation of the names of cultural relics, Liangzhu site, Translation methods*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the strategic context of the “Chinese Culture Going Global”, cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries are becoming increasingly frequent, and Chinese culture is also receiving more and more attention from people around the world. Cultural relics carry ancient civilization and are witnesses of historical culture. Therefore, cultural relics’ translation is of great significance in spreading and inheriting Chinese culture and should receive sufficient attention.

The Liangzhu culture is an culture of the late Neolithic period in China, dating back 5300-4300 years, named after its origin in Liangzhu, Hangzhou. On July 6, 2019, the “Liangzhu Ancient City Site” was successfully listed in UNESCO World Heritage Site at the 43rd session. Therefore, the translation of cultural relics unearthed from Liangzhu has great research value.

The translation of cultural relics is not only the conversion between two languages, but also carries the mission of conveying culture. Therefore, in terms of translation

methods, traditional methods may not be suitable. This article will explore methods applicable to the translation of names of cultural relics to fully utilize their cultural dissemination function.

II. REQUIREMENTS FOR TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL RELIC NAMES

At present, there is no unified regulation on the translation methods of cultural relics in China. Such complex and arduous translation tasks mainly rely on translators to complete. The specific translation methods or techniques used also need to be analyzed by translators based on different situations. Based on previous research of other scholars, the author believes that the translation of cultural relic names should meet the following three requirements:

2.1 Informative and Culture-related

Cultural relics are concentrated reflection of a country's material and spiritual culture, for this reason, when translating the names of cultural relics, translators should fully understand the background culture of the relics and

master certain basic knowledge^[4]. For example, the “陶鬶” unearthed in Liangzhu site is even unfamiliar to Chinese people. Translator should search background information to know it's function, shape, material and so on.

2.2 Smooth and Concise

The length and complexity of cultural relic names vary greatly depending on their production process and the amount of known information. The more known information and the more complex production process, the more complex the name of cultural relics will be^[2]. Therefore, special attention should be paid to word selection when translating.

The translator should reasonably filter and arrange information while ensuring the translation is smooth and easy to understand. In summary, it is important to preserve the Chinese meaning as much as possible, in line with the reading habits and thinking patterns of foreign readers. For example, in Chinese, “壶” is generally translated as "jar", but the English word “jar” does not necessarily refer to the historical and cultural utensil “壶” in China. Therefore, Chinese scholars uniformly translate it as "Hu jar".

2.3 Standard Terminology

When translating cultural relics, the translator must use standardized vocabulary. For vocabulary with corresponding categories in foreign languages, priority should be given to using these vocabulary. For those without corresponding items, certain criteria should be established for standardization. For the same type of object, ensure consistency before and after. For example, when translating “玉琮”, one of the most important jade objects that appears frequently, the translator should ensure the consistency when translating relevant text.

III. TRANSLATION METHODS

3.1 Literal Translation

On the basis of maintaining the cultural information inherent in the cultural relics themselves, if English can find expressions that correspond in both form and connotation, with directly corresponding or similar conceptual images, and the target language readers can obtain the same or similar understanding and feelings as the source language readers, literal translation can be used. For example:

玉纺轮 jade spinning wheel

玉三叉形器 jade trident-shaped vessel

玉锥形器 jade conical vessel

玉柱形器 jade column-shaped vessel

玉半圆形器 jade semicircular vessel

石刀 stone knife

In these examples, as these terms suggest, targets can imagine that “玉纺轮” is a kind of spinning wheel made up from jade, and “玉半圆形器” is a kind of jade ware in semicircular shape. Therefore, though the translation of these ancient vessels is still recognized as belonging to the cultural system of the source text, readers can understand them.

3.2 Add Annotation

Due to significant historical and cultural differences between English and Chinese, some cultural relic names are unique to China, which makes it difficult to accurately translate them into English. Annotation is an effective method to compensate for the cultural default, which enables the readers to enjoy the cultural exploration while comprehending the translation version^[3]. Annotation is always combined with transliteration^[1].

For example, “玉琮” is translated into Jade Cong (a long hollow piece of jade with rectangular side). If you transliterate “玉琮” directly into "Jade Cong", readers will find it difficult to read, so it is necessary to explain their historical background and provide relevant information to help readers better understand it.

3.3 Free Translation

When choose this translation method, it means translator deleting any foreign connotations and choosing neutral reference. In other words, it discards the specific image in the source text and directly reveal the meaning of the source text.

For example, “四系罐” is translated into “pottery container with four handles on the shoulder”. The translator did not translate literally, but used flexible translation methods to convey the deep information.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the actual translation process, translation methods such as literal translation, annotation, and free translation are relative, not absolute. In addition to the translation methods mentioned in the article, there are many different translation methods available for translators to choose from. How to choose translation methods depends on many factors. But the requirements for translation are similar and the author will improve translation skills to achieve these requirements.

There are a wide variety of cultural relics unearthed in the Liangzhu site, and the author alone cannot analyze the translation of all the relics, but the important thing is promoting Chinese culture to go global through translation of cultural relics.

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